

Behind the Badge

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

With the new school year fast approaching, the Rock County Sheriff's Office & local law enforcement agencies within Rock County want to remind all drivers to adhere to all laws regarding the approach of a designated school bus. School bus transportation is safe, however, according to the National Coalition for School Bus Safety, **17,000 children are injured annually in school bus-related traffic accidents nationwide**. Nearly one-fourth of these accidents occurred while children were boarding or exiting the school bus. Wisconsin law is clear in that as a driver, if you approach a legally marked bus with flashing red warning lights, you must:

- Stop at least 20 feet from the bus. This applies both to vehicles approaching from the rear and from opposing lanes.
- All lanes of traffic must stop for the school bus except in opposing lanes if the highway is divided with a center median.
- No vehicle may proceed until the bus resumes motion and turns off its flashing red warning lights.
- The stop arm on the bus is an added communication device for other drivers, but lack of the extended arm is not a reason to pass a bus whose red lights are still flashing.

For parents of students, it is important to have your children adhere to the following guidelines. These guidelines will help ensure a safe trip between home and school.

At The Bus Stop:

- Always walk to the bus stop. Never run. Walk facing traffic.
- Have your child wait in a safe area away from traffic and the road.
- Stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop and the driver signals for your child to board. Watch for red flashing lights and the stop sign to be extended, and cross only when all traffic has stopped. Look left, right, and left again before crossing.

Exiting the Bus:

- When being dropped off, have your child take 10 giant steps away from the bus, remember that the bus driver can see your child better when they move away from the bus.
- Have your child always use the handrail when entering or exiting the bus and have them always remain seated until the bus stops.
- If you leave something on the bus, never return to the bus to get it. The bus driver may not see you come back and they may begin moving the bus. Also, if you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver before you attempt to pick it up so they will know where you are.
- Be aware of traffic on the roadway. Drivers are required to stop for all legal school buses, however, not all do. Have your child watch carefully before crossing the roadway. Remember in rural areas the speed limit is greater and thus more difficult for a driver to stop quickly.

The start of a new school year is exciting for both students and their parents. Rock County Sheriff's deputies and local law enforcement agencies will be out enforcing all traffic laws regarding school buses, however, it is important for students to practice safe habits that ensure a safe school year.

Source: The Rock County Sheriff's Department. August 19th, 2009